THE WORLD.

NUMBER CXIV.

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To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *March* the 6th, 1755.

THE notion of BIRTH, as it is commonly called and eſtabliſhed by cuſtom, is alſo the manifeſt reſult *of the prejudices of the many, and of the deſigns of a few.* It is the child of Pride and Folly, coupled together by that induſtrious pander, Self-love. It is ſurely the ſtrongeſt inſtance, and the weakeſt prop of human vanity. If it means any thing, it means a long lineal deſcent from a founder, whoſe induſtry or good fortune, whoſe merit, or perhaps whoſe guilt, has enabled his poſterity to live uſeleſs to ſociety, and to tranſmit to theirs their pride and their patrimony. However, this extravagant notion, this chimerical advantage, the effect of blind chance, where prudence and option cannot even pretend to have the leaſt ſhare, is that FLY which, by a kind of Egyptian ſuperſtition, Cuſtom all over Europe has deified, and at whoſe tawdry ſhrine good ſenſe, good manners and good nature are daily ſacrificed.

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THE vulgar diſtinction between people of BIRTH and people of NO BIRTH will probably puzzle the critics and antiquarians of the thirtieth or fortieth centuries, when in their judicious and laborious reſearches into the cuſtoms and manners of theſe preſent times, they ſhall have reaſon to ſuppoſe that in the ſixteenth, ſeventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the iſland of Great Britain was inhabited by two ſorts of people, ſome BORN, but the much greater number UNBORN. The fact will appear ſo *incredible*, that it will certainly be *believed*; the only difficulty will be how to account for it; and that, as it commonly does, will engroſs the attention of the learned. The caſe of Cadmus's men will doubtleſs be urged as a caſe in point to prove the poſſibility of the thing; and the truth of it will be confirmed by the records of the univerſity of Oxford, where it will appear that an unborn perſon, called for that reaſon *Terræ Filius*, annually entertained that univerſity with an oration in the theatre.

I THEREFORE take with pleaſure this opportunity of explaining and clearing up this difficulty to my remoteſt ſucceſſors in the republic of letters, by giving them the true meaning of the ſeveral expreſſions of GREAT BIRTH, NOBLE BIRTH, BIRTH, and NO BIRTH AT ALL.

GREAT and illuſtrious BIRTH is aſcertained and authenticated by a pedigree carefully preſerved in the family, which takes at leaſt an hour's time to unroll, and when unrolled, diſcloſes twenty inter-marriages of valliant and puiſſant Geoffreys and Hildebrands, with as many chaſte and pious Blaunches and Mauds, before the conqueſt, not without here and there a daſh of the Plantagenets. But if unfortunately the inſolent worms ſhould have devoured the pedigree as well as the perſons of the illuſtrious family,

mily, that defect may be ſupplied by the authentic records of the herald's office, that ineſtimable repoſitory of good ſenſe and uſeful knowledge. If this GREAT BIRTH is graced with a peerage, ſo much the better; but if not, it is no great matter; for being ſo ſolid a good in itſelf, it wants no borrowed advantages, and is unqueſtionably the moſt pleaſing ſentiment that a truly generous mind is capable of feeling.

NOBLE BIRTH implies only a peerage in the family. Anceſtors are by no means neceſſary for this kind of birth; the patent is the midwife of it, and the very firſt deſcent is noble. The family arms, however modern, are dignified by the coronet and mantle; but the family livery is ſometimes, for very good reaſons, laid aſide.

BIRTH, ſingly, and without an epithet, extends, I cannot poſitively ſay how far, but negatively, it ſtops where uſeful arts and induſtry begin. Merchants, tradeſmen, yeomen, farmers and ploughmen, are not BORN, or at leaſt, in ſo mean a way, as not to deſerve that name; and it is perhaps for that reaſon that their mothers are ſaid to be *delivered*, rather than *brought to bed* of them. But baronets, knights and eſquires have the honour of being BORN.

I MUST confeſs that before I got the key to this faſhionable language, I was a good deal puzzled myſelf with the diſtinction between BIRTH and NO BIRTH; and having no other guide but my own weak reaſon, I miſtook the matter moſt groſly. I fooliſhly imagined that *well-born*, meant born with a ſound mind in a ſound body; a healthy, ſtrong conſtitution, joined to a good heart and a good underſtanding. But I never ſuſpected that it could poſſibly mean the ſhrivelled, taſteleſs fruit

fruit of an old genealogical tree. I communicated my doubts, and applied for information to my late worthy and curious friend, the celebrated Mrs. Kennon, whoſe valuable collection of foſſiles and minerals, lately ſold, ſufficiently proves her ſkill and reſearches in the moſt recondite parts of nature. She, with that frankneſs and humanity which were natural to her, aſſured me that it was all a vulgar error, in which however the nobili y and gentry prided themſelves: but that in truth ſhe had never obſerved the children of the quality to be wholeſomer or ſtronger than others, but rather the contrary; which difference ſhe imputed to certain cauſes, which I ſhall not here ſpecify. This natural (and, I dare ſay, to the beſt of her obſervation, true) account confirmed me in my former philoſophical error. But ſtill not thoroughly ſatisfied with it, and thinking that there muſt be ſomething more in what was ſo univerſally valued, I determined to get ſome farther information by addreſſing myſelf to a perſon of vaſt, immenſe, prodigious BIRTH, and deſcended *atavis regibus*, with whom I have the honour of being acquainted. As he expatiates willingly upon that ſubject, it was very eaſy for me to ſet him a going upon it; inſomuch that upon ſome few doubts which I humbly ſuggeſted to him, he ſpoke to me in the following manner.

"I BELIEVE, Mr. Fitz-Adam, You are not (for no "body is) ignorant of the antiquity of my family, which "by authentic records I can trace up to king Alfred, "ſome of whoſe blood runs at this moment in my veins; "and I will not conceal from you that I find infinite "inward comfort and ſatisfaction in that reflection. Let "people of NO BIRTH laugh as much as they pleaſe at "theſe notions; they are not imaginary; they are real;

"they

" they are ſolid; and whoever is WELL BORN, is glad " that he is ſo. A merchant, a tradeſman, a yeoman, " a farmer and ſuch ſort of people, may perhaps have " common honeſty and vulgar virtues; but take my " word for it, the more refined and generous ſentiments " of honour, courage and magnanimity can only flow " in ancient and noble blood. What ſhall animate a " tradeſman or mean-born man to any great and heroic " virtues? Shall it be the examples of his anceſtors? " He has none. Or ſhall it be that impure blood that " rather ſtagnates than circulates in his veins? No; AN- " CIENT BIRTH and NOBLE BLOOD are the only true " ſources of great virtues. This truth appears even among " brutes, who we may obſerve never degenerate, except " in caſes of miſ-alliances with their inferiors. Are not " the pedigrees of horſes, cocks, dogs, &c. carefully " preſerved, as the never failing proofs of their ſwift- " neſs and courage? I repeat it again, BIRTH is an in- " eſtimable advantage, not to be adequately underſtood " but by thoſe who have it."

My friend was going on, and to ſay the truth, growing dull, when I took the liberty of interrupting him, by acknowledging that the cogency of his arguments, and the ſelf-evidence of his facts, had intirely removed all my doubts, and convinced me of the unſpeakable advantages of ILLUSTRIOUS BIRTH; and unfortunately I added, that my own vanity was greatly flattered by it, in conſequence of my being lineally deſcended from the firſt man. Upon this my friend looked grave, and ſeemed rather diſpleaſed; whether from a ſuſpicion that I was jeſting, or upon an apprehenſion that I meant to *out-deſcend* him, I cannot determine; for he contented himſelf with ſaying, " That is not a neceſſary conſequence neither,